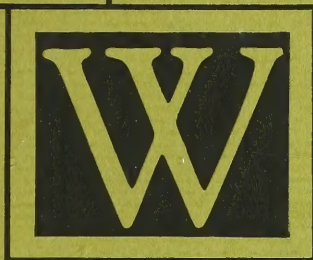
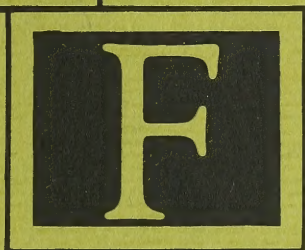


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Conversations with Bill
by G. McLeod Bryan

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W. W. Finlator has been variously called the watchdog of the state government, the conscience of the south, the gadfly of his denomination, the dean of all churchmen supporting labor unions, the defender of civil liberties, and a friend of the poor, the powerless, and the voiceless. A Baptist minister, reared in North Carolina and serving for fifty years churches in the eastern half, the last twenty-six at Pullen Memorial in Raleigh, he has also served in a national capacity on many boards, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Southerners for Economic Justice, and the Advisory Committee for the U. S. Civil Rights Commission.

His sermons have been more widely reproduced in newspapers and journals than perhaps any other southern clergyman. His writings have appeared extensively in national journals: during 1981 alone six articles appeared and one national journal between the years 1967 and 1981 ran nineteen. He commenced a regular column in 1939 under the pen-name "Festus Erasmus." He sparked the founding of a magazine, Christian Frontiers, and wrote most of its editorials.

He has won the Frank Porter Graham Award (1980), the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Award (1980), the N. C. Human Relations Council Award (1981), and several awards from black groups. Within his own denomination he is celebrated for having introduced almost annually provocative, socially-concerned resolutions on issues ranging from the banning of capital punishment to the decriminalization of victimless crimes. He has sometimes been called the minister who marches since he has joined innumerable protest groups, from the Freedom Riders of 1961 to the ERA rally of 1981.

He has managed a wide friendship stretching across the spectrum of newspeople, social liberals, judges and politicians, artists and writers, ecumenical leaders, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, and university personnel. All the while he has occupied a pulpit which Sunday after Sunday has distinguished itself for its prophetic voice. If history is best written by the preacher who speaks God's apt word to the urgent issues of his generation, then the researcher cannot ignore Bill Finlator's files. In fact, the Wisconsin

—continued on back cover.

GX9185

Conversations with W.W. Finlator

Paul Green to Bill Finlator, November 12, 1980:

"Dreams that often get fastened down in steel and
concrete, ritual and rote may prove obdurate and
evil, cruel and oppressive, but we must keep at the
business of awakening the sleeper, mustn't we?
You do!"

by G. McLeod Bryan

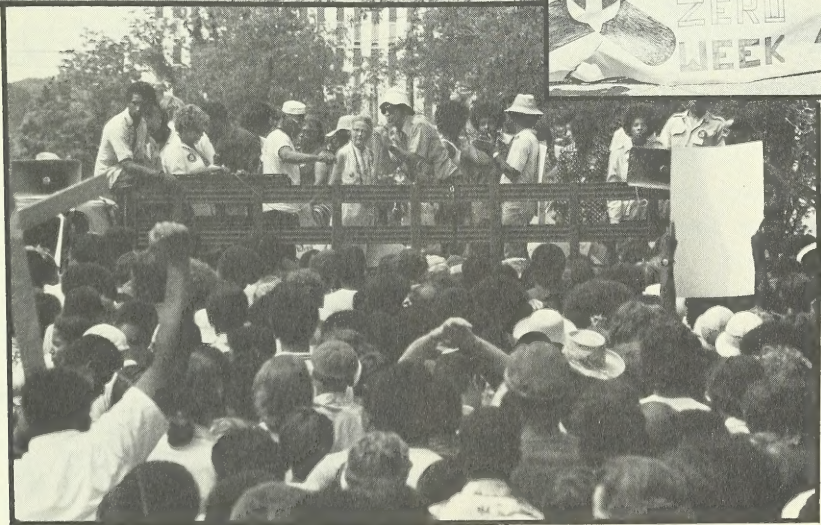
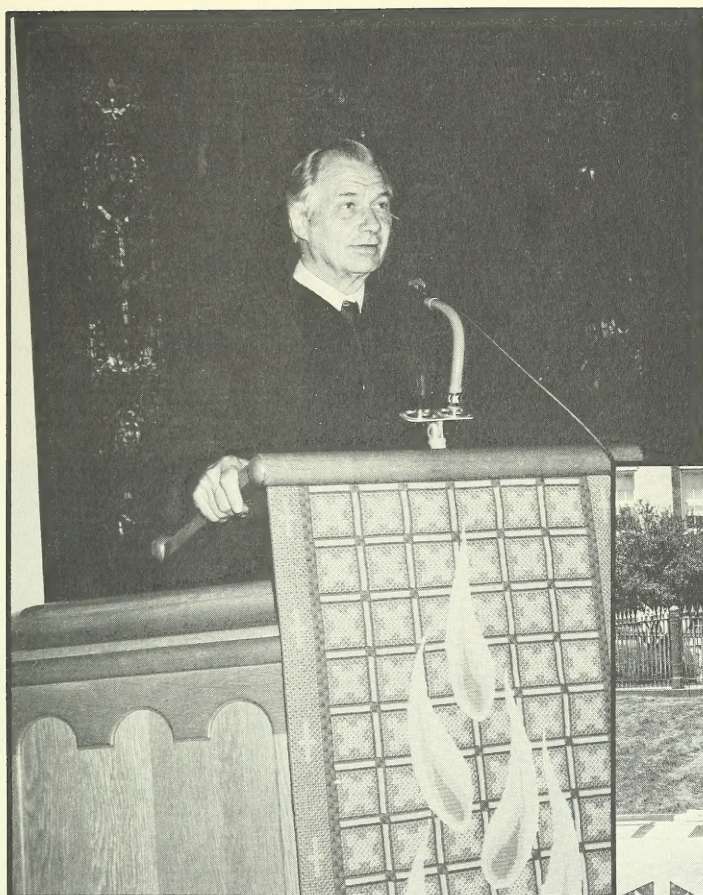
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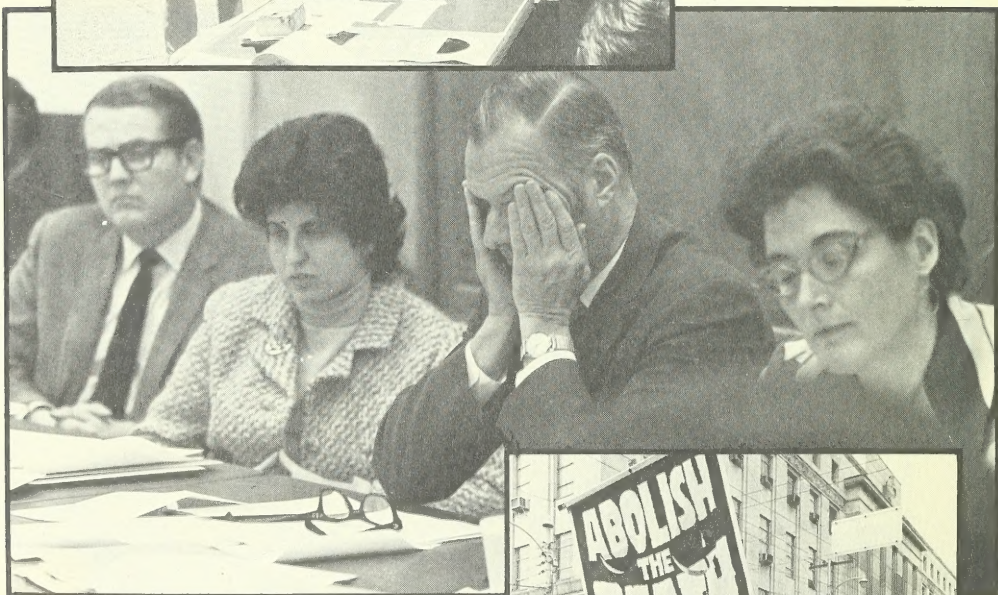
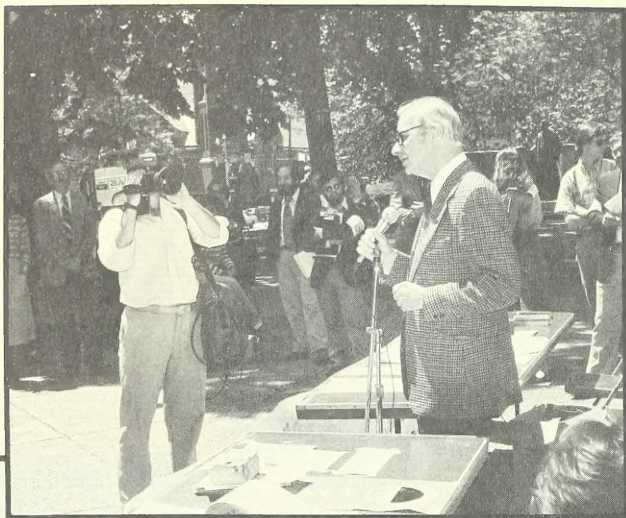
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Q Some people say the south would never be what it is without Bill Finlator, certainly not North Carolina. You have managed to get the ear of many of our public leaders: Senator Ervin on civil rights and E.R.A., President Friday on desegregation of the university system, governors all the way from Luther Hodges on labor unions to Jim Hunt on the Wilmington Ten, even to several of our presidents. Tell me, Bill, what's the secret of a lowly Baptist preacher speaking to the Cabots and the Lodges?

A I think to stand in a pulpit and not to say something current and prophetic, speaking not only to my congregation but to the world today, is wrong, is missing a great opportunity.

Q You mention the word "prophetic;" you must be aware that most preachers find themselves more comfortable functioning as priests and pastors?

A Yes, in summoning up remembrance of things past I am well aware that, as Robert Frost put it, I took the less traveled path and it made all the difference. Still I am impressed with the consistency with which I have fulfilled that commitment made years ago, which was that my ministry should give major emphasis to corporate and collective ethics rather than to private and individual morality. Not that I have minimized the latter at all but that I have long known that some 95% of my fellow clergymen would be working that side of the street to the neglect, as I feared, of what St. Paul called the principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in the high places. Or, to borrow from Reinhold Niebuhr's great book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, my decision was to leave 'moral man' to the tender mercies of my brethren while I, however ineffectively in my Don Quixote role, would take on the 'immoral society,' and I have no apologies.

Q When did you first want to be a prophet?

A Oh, I guess all little Baptist boys aspiring to be preachers want to be prophets. I even attended a seminary which

boasted of being America's "school for prophets"! But I observed that though the word was celebrated and the prophet-heroes of the past ages were eulogized, the professors and their proteges comfortably exited through the same door by which they entered. I only encountered the full dimensions of the prophetic when reading about Walter Rauschenbusch, the early twentieth century Baptist prophet, and his conception of the Social Gospel. I could accept that role of the minister. As I see prophecy it reads: In compassion God speaks to the human community through certain rare, called persons. Those who authentically represent God interpret the activity of God in social history. They answer the presence of God in the midst of political and economic life; they foretell the judgment and hope that are implicit in the loyalties and practices of the common life; and they set forth the vision of covenantal renewal. . . . The ministry must be all of this; otherwise it can really be a sort of cop-out and a desire to escape from the awesome and shaking prophetic word.

Q You must have known rather early in life that such a vocational choice was awfully presumptuous and would entrap you in controversy?

A It is indeed presumptuous to make such a claim. Reinhold Niebuhr once said that any minister who says, "Thus saith the Lord," is either self-deluded or a charlatan or a prophet, and the percentages against his being the last are frightening.

Q And what about controversy? A lawyer-member of your former pastorate in Elizabeth City recalls how "every time you opened your mouth half the world got mad."

A The prophetic ministry is the strait gate and the narrow way, and few there be that enter in thereat. The demands are stringent, the requirements tough, and the journey lonely. In every way the minister who chooses it is tasked and challenged far beyond his brethren who travel highways surveyed by tradition and paved with orthodoxy . . . Still,

as I wrote in my first article published in the *Biblical Recorder* in 1939, "It is for us to observe that wherever this spirit of defiance and daring has entered into the heart of man the stream of human history has changed its course."

Q Incidentally the first article you got published in a national magazine was entitled "The Prophetic Ministry." In that you remarked how "many a prophet has been gibbeted in the public press." How do you see yourself treated at the hands of the press over the years?

A I think the press has been very fair with me and very generous. Not that I haven't gotten my come-up-ances from the fourth estate from time to time. But of course I am fair game, and that's part of the dialogue. As far as setting me up or staging a story, it would be only normal that a reporter, being human, might turn to sources that he would find friendly and readily available. It cannot be denied that I have relished the publicity granted to my views by the press, I mean of course the secular press (the religious press was not so receptive). I would not say that editors have gone out of their way to give me a good press, but I would say that editors have understood what I said and did and for the most part supported me on principle. The press has been extraordinarily kind to me. They have always quoted me, represented me, fairly. Surely there have been times the local press has taken exception to my position, and written editorials taking sharp contrast with me, but they have rarely attacked me personally.

Q You seem to have forgotten the vicious attacks of certain papers and the seemingly running vendetta of the now-senator Jesse Helms belittling you in his WRAL editorials.

A I guess you can say that the most scathing ad hominem attack ever made against me was his editorial of November 17, 1967. I had presented my anti-Vietnam resolution at the Baptist State Convention and it was rejected. Helms commented: "The most encouraging report of the Baptist

State Convention's rejection of Rev. W. W. Finlator's proposed resolution on Vietnam was not that the Baptists rejected it, but that they rejected it with such swiftness that no doubt remains as to the question of Mr. Finlator's lack of influence within his own denomination. Hereafter, no matter how much publicity the gentleman receives from the 'liberal' press, he has now overplayed his hand. . . . Ironically it was the Rev. Finlator's insatiable appetite for publicity that did him in." Yet subsequent to that day, the Senator has expressed his friendship for me and has incorporated my statements into the *Congressional Record*. You must remember that we know each other as fellow Christians; he's a Baptist too.

Q Would you grant that the press has actually promoted you?

A Yes, you may say that the press has boosted me. Very early along my way, I sensed a collegial relationship. We were partners in a common cause. We were able to sustain, affirm and promote each other's activities. Many of the newspaper people I have known have been very fine persons, open to the truth, and I found that very consonant with what I thought should be going on in the pulpit. I sensed the press could be in many ways an extension of the pulpit. I always felt that the pulpit is an open thing. It's in the public eye. Nothing you can say there can be hidden; it belongs to the public, and there's nothing wrong in extending it beyond the borders of the church. Items that are in the public interest, I have no hesitation in sharing with the press.

Q There are some, even your friendly fellow clergymen, who maintain you receive an undue amount of coverage.

A Offhand, I'd say I get more coverage because I am a Baptist, a Southern Baptist, if you please! The gentlemen, and women, of the press have the habit of looking for a voice within the ranks which sounds a different trumpet. It's also because of the region we live in. It's the south where traditionally when a clergyman said something on a

relevant public issue he was listened to. The south, even its newspapers, still pays attention to the pulpit. Also, I can reveal that some of the journalists may have used me as a surrogate pastor. So many have given up on the Church. And many are really moralists and prophets. In many ways their role is analogous to mine. They, like the pulpit minister, stand in an adversarial posture to the establishment.

Q Let's go back to the question of controversy. You have quite a reputation for enjoying controversy.

A On occasions I have been asked why I become involved in controversy. Controversy is exciting, and I like exciting things. Put another way, a minister has to be three things: bold, brassy and something of a ham. At times I have been all three. But most of all I want to be the first. As a matter of fact, the pulpit is always in the limelight and to occupy the pulpit Sunday after Sunday without making a difference, without really stirring the people, without agitating for the Lord, may be a big sin.

Q But don't you run the danger of popping-off without all the facts, of dogmatizing from a heavily biased stance?

A I don't deny that my answers are often quick and simple. My only rationalization is that in certain times of general emergency, forthrightness demands vigorous statements, not namby-pamby mutterings.

Q Have there been major issues which you dared not ventilate though you secretly cherished doing so?

A Yes and I still have to live with the shame of being silent when I should have spoken, quiescent when I should have been involved. I should have defended more loyally and loudly Frank Porter Graham when he was being smeared in his campaign for the Senate of the United States. Again, in 1960, I wish that I might have raised my voice more clearly on the question of Jack Kennedy's religion, defending his right to be a Catholic and at the same time

to maintain the principle of the separation of church and state. . . . You know there is this prudential and cautious vein in me which a lot of folks don't see. Perhaps a more honest term is cowardice. I do indeed pop off too many times and I have been biased from time to time. Issues before our people today are complex and convoluted and it is not right for a minister to give easy solutions. We just have to be on our guard continually against this. Nonetheless, to say nothing, to show no outrage or anger, or to raise no protest is a more grievous error than to make statements without waiting for all the facts to come in. I did try to warn my congregation, however, that all "the noise and fireworks of controversy" and my understanding and assessment of it, is not the same as the "voice of God." I have never claimed any inerrancy or insisted that I have a special pipeline to heaven unavailable to others.

Q Don't you lose opportunities to address all the people when you take this tact? For instance, your advocacy of the poor and those on the underside of our society, clearly a biased advocacy, cuts you off from addressing the power structures of the community, does it not?

A Of course I have lost opportunities to speak, many times. This is to be expected. There have even been actual cancellations, not only from civic clubs but from PTAs and college campuses. But there is always this other consideration. No person can try to listen carefully to the gospel and be aware of the world today without becoming controversial. You yourself cited to me once Martin Luther's describing the authentic Christian as being present where the battle rages. He also speaks of the "wicked silence" of church people. When push comes to shove, I'd rather be with the non-silent ones.

Q And how did your Pullen congregation take the many controversies of their pastor?

A There's never been a time that a minister as kooky as I am hasn't distressed them. But the Pullen folk are the most

free-will Baptists I've ever seen. They're a fascinating collection of humanity. They do their own thinking. This is what makes them — and keeps them — the most exciting congregation I ever knew.

Q Still the most grievous controversy for you personally arose within the ranks of the church itself, over your 1979 telegram as a private citizen urging President Carter to enforce the desegregation laws pertaining to the university system.

A Church divisions are always regrettable and very difficult to know how to respond to. I suppose that to some extent I lived in a kind of dream world. I have always known that I subjected these wonderful people at Pullen to a whole lot and it is little short of miraculous that they sustained, if not tolerated, me for more than a quarter of a century. I know of few other churches in the south where I might have survived under similar circumstances. So as unfortunate as the entire situation has been and as much as it hurt us and as much as I am tempted to resent it bitterly, it has to be seen in the wider perspective.

Q Though I know your career was filled with a series of controversies, which would you specify as the pivotal ones, the ones which you think helped shape the course of history?

A Well, the really big ones, the ones which never simmered down, centered around race, war and unions. But would you believe that the most mail response was stirred by my article refusing to cooperate in the Raleigh sponsorship of Billy Graham? Even Billy himself mailed me a confidential retort. And his daughter, who incidentally is married to my dentist, gave a lengthy response in space allotted to her by the newspaper which had earlier carried my statement.

Q What did you say that carried such a sting?

A Dr. Graham is a phenomenon of our times. However, his interpretation of the Gospel and mine are not the same. He

preaches on sin and judgment, as every preacher should, but sins with him are personal and private. As one theologian puts it, of the Saturday night variety. Nowhere do I find Dr. Graham on record as denouncing the sins of corporate powers and economic structures. His call for law and order is for the man in the street rather than for ITT and his strictures against permissiveness are never directed at the laissez faire practices of economic and industrial giants. I often think of Jesus' remark to the effect that while these things should be done, we should not leave the weightier matters of the law . . . I went on to challenge him as to why he supported capital punishment and the Vietnam war, and why he had remained aloof from the civil rights campaign for blacks. . . . I must add quickly that something some of us said must have had its effect because Billy has moved more constructively in our direction since then.

Q You cite the abstract issues of race, war and unions — surely they are not controversial in the abstract?

A Oh no, I didn't mean that at all. It was when I spoke out or acted concretely that the storms broke. For instance, my 1965 telegram to President Johnson opposing escalation and my joining Clergy and Laymen Against the War, these specifics raised the rankles. Vietnam seemed to upset the congregation, and the public, more than anything else I had done up to that moment. It sounded like betrayal or treason. The people had sons in service. N. C. State University of course, like most institutions, was more or less involved in the war effort. The congregation was just not up to dealing with a pastor who stood in open defiance against his nation at war. And, I hasten to add, I must have bored in too heavily upon them, preaching too many sermons on the subject. They had a right to squirm.

Even so, they treated me better than the denomination. I never have been so cruelly treated as when I introduced my resolutions against the war at the state conventions. I can still hear the hissing and screaming from the floor of

the 1967 convention: "Send Finlator to Vietnam." Even the presiding officer violated parliamentary procedure to squelch me. And, of course, you may have heard of the celebrated time I was moving to the platform in a subsequent year to introduce my resolution when a delegate loudly proclaimed, "I hope you fall into the orchestra pit."

Q But that was in jest?

A In those spirited debates it was hard to tell which was in jest and which was vicious. . . . I received similar abuse when I defended the world champion Cassius Clay when he refused to be drafted on grounds of his religious conscience. I was exposing two sacrosanct nerves, racism and militarism. But I suppose my stands against racism have brought on the most enduring criticism. Very early, in my first three pastorates and in my published articles I kept hammering on the plight of the Negro. With the Court decision of 1954 I issued a public letter urging our state officials to comply. But it was when I took to the streets and approved the sit-ins that I really caught the flak. It was not easy for me to do this, but when I observed members of my own congregation marching along Fayetteville Street to urge the theatres and restaurants to desegregate I followed suit. But I don't think they expected me to go as far as I did, and to continue for so many years. The Marie Hill case, the Wilmington Ten, the Charlotte Three, Joan Little, the march with Angela Davis — how many occasions I don't remember.

Q Did your church ever restrain you and did you ever lose members on account of your witness?

A As to the first, no, never. They were on the whole very supportive; in fact, many worked harder and were further along than I. As to losing members, yes. On the occasion of our entertaining the Poor People marchers in the spring following King's death, feeding them in our church, I received a letter from a member moving his membership.

Among the charges he made was that “these people advocate anarchy and to a great extent are communist inspired. It is common knowledge that their leaders offer white students money and all the sex they desire if they will join the march. With such decadent principles as this, I just cannot conceive of any church condoning such acts.” Any church which takes a strong, courageous stand on issues of Christian concern can expect to lose some members, but it will gain others.

Q You are chaplain of the state AFL-CIO. Perhaps not as publicized is your winning their award in 1980, with the plaque reading, “A preacher who practices what he preaches.” How does it happen that a preacher in a middle-class, white-collar, campus church, and a Baptist at that, serves as chaplain to a labor union?

A I am unabashedly a friend of labor and industrial unionism. My father was a railroad conductor and a member of the Order of Railroad Conductors, a labor union which gave dignity and security to his work. He kept all three of us children in college in the heart of the depression. Whatever gain in working conditions, wages and hours and health and retirement have come to the laboring people of America have come through their unions. It is just that, pure and simple. I have been privileged to stand with labor leaders in support of minimum wages and in opposition to the unjust and the unsporting right-to-work laws. I have strongly endorsed labor’s committee on political education and have encouraged the unions to a policy of bringing our black citizens into full membership. I have urged the extension of labor’s concern to migrant and unorganized farm workers who of all groups stand most in need of labor’s friendship. I proudly stood with the AFL-CIO in its dramatization of grievances against the Carolina Power and Light Company. And I have gladly contributed my bit towards exploring areas where church and labor might work more closely together in common causes. It has been difficult for me as a child of labor to see why collective

strength as represented in, say, the Merchants Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Farm Bureau, medical, bar, real estate and bankers associations, could suddenly become a thing of fear and dread, to be legislated against and harried out of the land, when the working class seeks similar refuge and security. I always felt that what was good for Paul and Silas, and for the Hebrew children, was good enough for me . . .

Q How do you relate your commitments to labor with your professional job in the church?

A The church must take a new look at labor by taking a new look at the New Testament. As a child of God, man, any person, "even the least of these my brethren," is by virtue of his humanity of infinite worth regardless of productive capacity. The lost, the despised, the diseased, the handicapped, the forgotten, in short, the disadvantaged, were the people sought out by Jesus for no other reason than that they were there and God loved them. Hence the parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Son. The church ought to be on the side of the people, I mean people who can't protect themselves. That accounts for some of the things I do. I believe that means unionism for the poor people and unionism against race discrimination and unionism against a cold war economy.

Q Yet you and I know very well that any history of organized labor in the south will have to expose the opposition of the churches to unionism. That history has been thoroughly documented in Liston Pope's *Millhands and Preachers*, and in its forty year follow-up, *Spindles and Spires*.

A I ran into my first real reaction of the church on the occasion of the Henderson textile strike of 1959. A local Baptist association of churches actually requested that I address myself to the strike. What I said then still needs saying, unfortunately:

“It may come with ill grace for an afternoon visitor to take to task his fellow churchmen in a community that has suffered what only the residents of Henderson can really know. An outsider, safe from the awful realities, can be presumptuous and for this I beg forgiveness. Yet as outsiders we wondered again and again if the local churches had no word at all to speak when the entire community was in the throes of an agonizing struggle.

“That the church spoke the quiet word of solace and strength to her people, I doubt not, and this is always important, as is also the office of the church to condemn violence. But with men out of work week after week, with the honest expectation of their jobs crumpling into dust at the last hour, with the fear in their faces and the despair in their hearts that will drive any man to extremities, with a state government which in the final analysis had nothing more to offer than the Highway Patrol and the National Guard, and with a respected union deliberately ‘busted,’ the church, so far as I know, never said a mumbling word! Surely, my brethren, this is what Martin Luther would again call ‘wicked silence,’ and we confess with shame that we, too, on the outside have participated in this silence.

“The church does have a word for management-labor relations and that word is human dignity and human value which must always be placed before all other considerations. The church and its leaders dare not look the other way when in the dynamics of industrial strife clear ethical issues are at stake.”

Q You made the national headlines when you addressed the J. P. Stevens stock-holders annual meeting in 1979. What happened?

A For years we had been pushing the unionization of Stevens' many textile plants all over the southeast. On this occasion some of my friends, in this instance, some Roman Catholic sisters, purchased stock and allowed me to enter the stockholders' session as their proxy. I managed to get the floor. To the chairman, Mr. Finley, I said, “I am a Baptist

preacher from Raleigh. I wish you would pay your workers more. I have a selfish reason for this request. You see, Mr. Chairman, I suspect that most of your 40,000 workers are Southern Baptists. I'm also a Southern Baptist — a Baptist minister approaching retirement. If your workers had more money, they would give more to their Baptist churches . . .” Chairman James Finley and many stockholders got the point. They broke out in smiles. This gave me the wedge to persuade the Corporation to negotiate fairly with the unions.

Q As an insider within the union movement did you ever feel uncomfortable as a Christian with any of their policies?

A I am honored to hear from certain quarters that I did influence labor to embrace wider humane causes. Yes, I think I did become firmly enough established so that I could sustain the consequences of any honest criticism leveled by me against union practices. . . . As I look back, I am somewhat surprised that they accepted me as well as they did. My reputation for exposing racism, my identification with civil liberties, my stand against war, and my pressing for unions to be concerned about **all** workers, not just the crafts, all of these matters came up for discussion in union meetings. They were taking a great risk in bringing me in, and I must pause to give appreciation for Millard Barbee who braved that risk. The same goes for Wilbur Hobby and the present president, E. A. Britt. I was even able to challenge the president of the national AFL-CIO, George Meany, for not dissociating himself and the working people of America from the Vietnam war.

Q You often referred to the labor leaders you worked with as Christians. Of Barbee, you eulogized: “I cherish the memory of my association with a fellow Christian, who came up in the ranks of labor and held unfalteringly to the vision that compassion and concern and caring for the less privileged could be translated into reality and made effective through collective strength.” This is not the image the public generally holds.

A I can honestly say that the leadership I have worked with, on picket lines, in strike rallies, at all the state conventions, have been among the finest people I have known. I don't know just how I "got in" with the unions except for a natural interest and desire to support them. I found opportunities to make friends with labor leaders and across the years they have included me and made me one of "the brethren." As a matter of fact I have run into numerous labor leaders who were active Christians and very church conscious. They have told me privately that they wished their own ministers might be active in the union but they seemed to hold no grudge against their ministers for their non-participation. They seemed to understand the predicament of a southern preacher with regard to the power structure which so often muzzles the pulpit.

Q You have been dubbed "the dean" of all churchmen working with organized labor. How has that affected your over-all ministry?

A I have known that I was a voice in the wilderness and I would not be able to persuade any substantial number of my fellow clergy to join the cause. I have had no fear from this kind of activity of alienating the business community from the church and the gospel. The mainline Protestant churches are safely in the fold and the business, civic and commercial leaders are pretty much in control and this will unfortunately continue for awhile. My outspokenness in this regard had indeed caused me to lose opportunities to speak in the chambers of commerce and the civic clubs. This is a price one must be willing and even happy to pay — though, to tell the truth, all those I grew up with are in that side of the ballpark. Nonetheless I am willing to continue repeating, "There is no real hope for poor southerners without good, reputable labor union, no other way to bring about justice and equity and fair distribution of the good things of our economy."

Q Yet oddly your congregations and your ecclesiastical connections have been mostly, as you put it, on the other

side of the ballpark. How did they accept your pro-labor stance?

A Did you know that one of my first appearances before the Pullen church was to speak on migrant workers? For ten years I had been minister of the First Baptist church in Elizabeth City. Through this area each spring and summer there passed one of the mainstreams of migrant labor. There they harvested cabbage and string beans and potatoes. There I saw at first hand their terrible plight. No one then, and very few now, seem responsible for their welfare and for their environmental decency. The church did a little but mostly in the nature of palliatives. We tried to arouse public indignation and compassion, but were not too successful. Dr. Poteat, the pastor of Pullen at the time, invited me to address myself to this problem. And as early as 1946 I was writing editorials in the new magazine *Christian Frontiers*, calling for a rapprochement between churches and labor. So they were fully apprized of my stand.

Q Nonetheless, it must have been hard for many to accept?

A Yes, I have always strongly identified myself with labor — as my Saviour did —, and I propose to continue to do so, though, as you imply, this became one of the chief causes of unhappiness with some members of our congregation.

Q To many social observers, you are a peculiarity, Bill. You just don't fit their stereotype of the typical southern preacher. You've gained the reputation as the south's severest critic, yet you love the south, you are devoted to the south, and above all you are its bona fide product. No one can accuse you of being an outsider. . .

A I do indeed love the south. Like Thoreau, the citizen of Concord, I can declare I have traveled widely within its borders.

Q Yet you mince no words in exposing the south's shortcomings. Isn't that something of a paradox?

A I see nothing strange in trying to improve the object one loves the most. Loyalty does not mean to love my country, my region, my state, my denomination whether it is right or wrong. Being loyal to the point of never abandoning the object of my loyalty gives me the right to address its most glaring deficiencies. The southerners I identify with, the truly great southerners — Paul Green, Gerald W. Johnson, Frank Porter Graham, Marion Wright, and of course its great literary masters like Robert Penn Warren and William Faulkner — all make the south great. I am proud to be associated with that brand of southern culture.

Q I notice that all the southerners you cite, while their roots are deep in their native soil, they speak for all mankind.

A I am what you might call “a born-again” southerner. True, I was born and bred here and have never lived outside the south. But you must also remember that I am male, white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, fairly educated, somewhat advantaged, a privileged Protestant minister, and a Southern Baptist at that. For me to break the bonds of this caste structure, I had to be born-again. Only after I had seen enough poverty and oppression and discrimination and visited enough bleak jails did I come to know viscerally the true side of the south. As I grew up, I learned painfully that the very structures which had blessed me, which gave me my privileged position, excluded black people and white poor people. In order to enjoy the status I possessed by accident of birth, I had to be willing to share it and to extend it to others.

Q But you must admit, Bill, not all church people interpret being “born again” that radically. How did you come to that?

A That I personally have lived so long and so complacently and so close to their indifference, consenting, like Saul of Tarsus, holding the coats, will certainly haunt me the rest of my days on earth and face me on the day of judgment.

We must challenge the middle-class axioms concerning the poor. I have seen migrant farm-workers in the fields and their families strewn about the yards of uninhabitable shacks, I have talked with brown lung castaways, and I have witnessed the spectacle and smelled the poverty of the inner city. I have come to the conclusion that these millions of Americans, trapped in tragedy and unable to make it on their own, should not therefore be deprived of their rights and privileges as American citizens. Our Lord was one of these poor people, and He spent his life among the poor and lowly, the tired and heavy-laden. The poor, the old people, the black people, the laboring people who want secure jobs — they all teach you. I can't help identifying with them. They rend your heart and stretch it.

Q You once explained your maverick behavior as being implanted in you while at Wake Forest College.

A Certain professors, yes. The Poteats, Paschal, Cullom, Reid. They were gentlemen scholars, thoroughly embedded in classical learning. They opened my eyes to a larger worldview and in turn taught me to be an independent thinker.

Q Though you claim their influence, you and I both know they would be the first to disclaim your radicalness: your anti-military stance, your fighting segregation, your favoring labor unions, your siding with the poor. . .

A I must admit the hardest part of growing up is to see the true size of one's mentors, and to try to rise above them. Wake Forest was no hotbed of radicals. The institution has been graduating preachers into the Baptist convention leadership for lo these many years and one would be hard put to find a single heretic or apostate, including myself, in the whole kit and caboodle. Suffice it here to say that we must indict our southern colleges and seminaries for their timidity and want of social vision.

Q What other factors influenced your transformation into a different kind of preacher?

A When I took my first parish, I was close enough to Raleigh to meet a young minister also just out of seminary, only he had graduated from Union in New York City. I couldn't believe how much the tone and extent of his education differed from mine. Carl Herman Voss put me onto a lot of liberal magazines and profound theological books which had somehow escaped my theological mentors. Not that I was altogether ignorant of these sources, but the emphasis at my seminary was different. I found an excitement I had missed.

Q I gather from your extensive bibliography that you early put your hand to writing and became rather widely published?

A Not really. Besides dispatching random pieces to this newspaper and that journal, I became a budding columnist with my own pseudonym. In fact, during the first year I produced some twenty columns.

Q What was your by-line?

A Festus Erasmus. Can you believe that? It was a bit sophomoric. I was trying to combine the word Festus, which of course is a Roman name in the New Testament and which means joy, to Erasmus which stands for wisdom and humanism. I wanted to identify myself with much of what goes under the banner of humanism. Somewhere I have read that Martin Luther wrote about Jesus that "if we take hold of Him as a man we would discover that He is God." Most of His teaching and action in the New Testament was mundane, that is to say, having to do with human life.

Q Are you, like Erasmus, a Christian humanist?

A I would not like to be known as a Christian humanist but I don't mind being called a humanist. I am a Christian who is also a humanist. It is a beautiful word. No one can truly believe in the doctrine of incarnation and reject humanism. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Or, again, "God so loved the world." Isn't it strange that people take

two words, secular, which is a beautiful word and humanism, which is another beautiful word, both biblically based, and make them a dirty term!

Q You are well aware that the term “humanist” is under heavy fire now from the religious right?

A Yes, but I see no reason for their suspicion whatsoever. For one thing, there are not that many humanists around. But far more significantly we have here a controversy which in my judgment is unnecessary, unfortunate, and avoidable. A deep love-respect should exist between Christian and Humanist. A willingness to listen and understand and work together would resolve many differences. And both have a shared and paramount mutual concern which in religious terms is the salvation and redemption, and in humanist terms is the enrichment and fulfillment, of our common humanity.

Q Isn't there a theological issue involved too?

A Indeed so. The Christians who reject humanism tend to reject the humanity of Christ; they approach heresy in the face of basic Christian belief. But Christians have always been afraid of this total humanity of Jesus and what it implies. It is a terrible threat to man's inhumanity to man. These Christians prefer to keep Jesus mystical, divine and distant. But the Christian faith for all its mystical and transcendent and supernatural qualities is yet the most materialistic and humanistic religion on earth.

Q Your wide humane interests have expressed themselves in the ecumenical contacts you have always cultivated. In spite of the sectarian withdrawal of the denomination you belong to, your church not only belongs to both the Southern and the American Baptist Conventions but also to the North Carolina Council of Churches and the World Council.

A I have often found myself more at home with other Christian bodies on what I take to be the universal spirit of Christ. An Episcopal magazine has published more of my articles;

the Quakers, especially those in the American Friends Service Committee, are more compatible with my peace aims; and early in my ministry I had to make a hard decision and split with the anti-catholicism of my predecessor and have since found myself enriched by the Catholicism expressed by the Berrigans, the Mertons, and the Rose Mary Reuthers. One of my earliest articles in the state Baptist journal encouraged my brethern not to shut their ears to the birth-cries of the National Council of Churches. Needless to say, I have not always been successful in these efforts. For instance, a few months prior to my leaving the pastorate at Elizabeth City, the Chairman of the Diaconate brought to the attention of the church that it had become a participant in the World Council. Some members had gotten the notion that this organization advocated revolutionary methods, including racial disturbances. This deacons' meeting was quite stormy and I was brought to task for somehow having caused the church to join. They voted to terminate our membership.

Q Such rebuffs do not seem to have deterred you over the years.

A I live in hope. Today I am happy to count among my friends the Catholic Bishop of the local diocese and many rabbis across the state.

Q I remember when a recent president of the Southern Baptists announced that God does not hear the prayer of a Jew you immediately responded with a clever piece entitled "The Prayer of Three Jews."

A I along with many other Baptists was shocked hearing such narrowness from our leader. I am proud to say that my Pullen congregation has rallied to resist any encroachments upon our ecumenical inclusiveness made by the denomination.

Q Baptists have rebuffed you and disowned you on so many

occasions, sometimes treating you rather shabbily — some would say with less than Christian charity —, why haven't you given up on them?

A I've always thought you have an obligation within the church and the region to understand it, to appropriate it, to grow in it, to transcend it. True, I have many times been a part of His Majesty's loyal opposition, but I've never wanted to leave His Majesty's kingdom.

Q You cannot deny that you have certainly afflicted Baptists with your endless resolutions — egging them on, agitating them, reminding them of their self-professed heights, calling them back to their radical roots. How could they stomach you?

A You are right to indicate that it took a lot of grace on the part of both sides in order for us to accept each other. But, you must remember, I am primarily a Baptist minister serving my church. I'm not a reformer, or a radical, or a professional do-gooder, in spite of what they say. But I do believe the church must lead the way on human rights. And I think that Baptists have gained a great deal of social awareness. While my "far out" resolutions may have been way ahead of them, the truth of the matter is that the Baptist Convention has come around to adopting in principle some of them. I never expected anything like immediate success and I was aware, even when I went down, I was scoring points, really registering an effect. If I have maintained my cool or preserved any personal integrity, it is because way down deep I felt I was for the most part right. With a God-guided conscience which counts on the moral capacity latent in all persons one develops a sense of stability, a calmness, and the courage to be unpopular.

Q Your son-in-law composed in fun your epitaph:

"Here lies the body of W. W.
No longer around to trouble you."

He was thinking of those who label you trouble-maker and rabble-rouser.

- A I have been called many things; the worst I cannot mention in polite society. Names like communist, red, traitor, nigger-lover. Naturally I am hurt when people so misread me. I am not by constitution a tough-skinned person. I am deeply sensitive to such brutal remarks. But I have tried not to take them personally, managing a smile and brushing them off with a quip. I was recently reminded by a friend of an episode that happened years ago here on the streets of Raleigh, something I had forgotten. We were in a protest march of some sort and Charlie Craven, a reporter for the *News and Observer* was interviewing me. A passerbyer looked me straight in the face. "You s.o.b.!" he taunted. My friend reports that I instantly turned to Charlie and said, "Did you hear what that man called you?"

I have found myself in many tense and dangerous positions, taking stands for what I believe Christ would also favor. I console myself that Christ was also a trouble-maker and that He brought into existence a rag-tag bunch of followers called upon to turn the world up-side-down.

- Q Have you ever been personally harmed or endangered by your unpopular stands?

- A There were the usual hate-letters, obscene telephone calls late at night, an occasional threat on my life, and I did go to the extent of parking my car under street lamps, just in case. . . . But I don't think I ever felt harassed. As the Psalmist puts it, I may have "imagined a vain thing," and perhaps, as Shakespeare says, supposed a bush to be a bear. There were indeed moments of personal fear. Perhaps greater than this was a sense of guilt, the fear that somebody might take something out on one of my children. Just how much my wife and family have suffered is something I am not able to compute. Probably the

children went through more in their teen ages than we'll ever know, though they seem to have come through pretty unscathed. Perhaps a minister's wife who has this additional burden of a husband like me, suffers most, especially when the guns attack from both inside and outside the church. Mary Lib, however, has accused me of enjoying the thick of battle, even having a zest for it. She may have a little justifiable resentment against me from time to time, but I think it may be safely said that the family has felt that we stood on the ground of principles and are proud to have done so.

Q In your labors for human rights, the poor, the voiceless and the defenceless, you have been seen "consorting with" all sorts of people, communists, revolutionists, anarchists, professional agitators. Two questions come to mind: first, how did you manage your Mr. Clean image, and, second, how do you think a Christian should function amidst such company?

A "Mr. Clean" is the last thing my bitterest enemies and closest friends would call me. They both know me better than that. And I know myself better than that. But I think I get what you mean. How does the Christian associate with the world without having the world to rub off on him. All I can say is that from my earliest commitment I have known it was absolutely necessary. In my first published article I gave expression to that fear: that no matter how noble the truth uttered it could be eclipsed by the moral flaw in the deliverer.

On the other hand, you must know also that I am something of "the last Puritan." Believe it or not, I am basically conservative. Look at my life, a thoroughly institutional man, a democrat, a supporter of law and order. I admit to a paradox in this claim. I tried to formulate this paradox once in an article widely circulated, "Why I am a Conservative." One of my most vigorous critics upon seeing the piece is said to have beat his head in despair.

Q Yet I have heard you say that you have in fact become more radical over the years, more radical than most of the organizations to which you belong.

A I hope I have become more radical and I think I've also become more conservative. I am not at heart an anarchist. On the contrary, you might even call me a law and order person. However law and order are never to be all and the end all. My record in labor halls, in civil liberties, within church councils does indeed appear to be impatient with plodding programs and restrictive goals.

Q You are aware that some groups do not think you radical enough, those Christians who think you exemplify civil religion, those committed to liberation theology, those not unlike churchmen in Poland who identify Marxism and Christianity. How do you answer them?

A That is the penalty of living too long! If one lives long enough one is bound to live through different levels of social concern; that's true also of Christians. However I find myself even in my sixties sitting on boards and committees alongside these younger radicals, able to communicate with them and not differing too widely on our ultimate goals. The radical vision of my early years has stood me well in the vagaries of history. I suppose if there are any two contentions that might separate us they would have to do with my faith in the democratic process and my fear of taking up the sword.

Q You have been called "North Carolina's voice of dissent." How and why did you undertake that role?

A I guess I just grabbed the stick of my Baptist heritage by the right end.

Q What do you mean by that?

A I mean that most Baptists have no idea how radical their heritage is. We are a denomination born in dissent, conceived among a persecuted minority. I have felt all

along that Southern Baptists, instead of being cautious and culture-conforming, that we should lift up our voice with strength and without fear and speak the prophetic word and pronounce the divine judgment on issues which so clearly and so unavoidably are freighted with Christian significance.

Q But you were so often alone in expressing that Baptist claim; even they sometimes thought you a laughable lot.

A Dissent is never easy, particularly in critical times. But it is all the more necessary to give expression of dissent in such a time. The majority opinion of any given society is often not the right opinion. Wise people look for truth and reality as they float to the surface in the boiling seas of social unrest. The less wise can think of nothing but the stifling of protest and the killing off of dissent. The society which does this blinds itself to possible deficiencies. True, the demonstration of protest and dissent is frequently an ugly episode. It heats up the passions of all concerned until the lava of violence may pour over the slopes in a destroying hate. Still protest and dissent offer striking opportunities for a culture, armed with its own mores and entrenched in its own customs, to see itself as it really is, to become less defensive of innovation, and to alter itself for the better. To paraphrase our Lord, I think there is more weeping in heaven over one dissenter squelched than over ninety-nine anti-dissident conservatives safely in the fold.

Q You seem to have found both your denomination and your state to be something less than hospitable toward dissent?

A Yes, on numerous occasions I seem to have touched the raw nerve of our exploitive conservatism. In our state, for instance, there seems to be a systematic use of courts and jails to suppress dissent. We charge communist countries for doing precisely this. We in turn must never use the structures of criminal justice to suppress dissent. And in religious circles we must never bury creative dissent under

the cloak of supercilious piety and false unity.

Q Do you find your public devotion to civil rights at odds with your Christian ministry?

A Whatever activism I have manifested grows naturally out of my religion. I operate on two levels — the Sermon on the Mount and the Bill of Rights. And, you must remember, my Baptist tradition holds to the literalness of the Sermon and contributed by suffering whiplashes to the particulars of the Bill.

Q There are some who hold that you are less a minister of the Gospel than you are a minister of the law, i.e., preaching more from the laws upholding civil liberties than from the Bible.

A Well, it cuts both ways. We have lots of people who side with law and order and wrap that position up in the gospel. On the other side, we desperately need the gospel speaking to the law. I would like to think that I have spent my time doing the latter, pursuing the spiritual radicalness implicit in the basic American documents.

Many of my arguments for justice and equality do in fact emerge from my Baptist understanding of the separation of church and state. I reject the myth of a Christian nation, as do all true Baptists. To be a Baptist with our history is to witness to the espousal of a free church in a secular state. In defending atheists this has to be done on principle. Freedom of religion implies also freedom from religion. There is no true guarantee of the practice of our faith unless we solidly defend the rights of people to have no religious faith. The Constitution never mentions God or the Bible or life immortal. It simply says in the first Amendment that the government will have no part in advancing or inhibiting religion.

Q In your self-appointed role as watch-dog of the Legislature, for decades now, you have invited the label “political parson.” How do you reply to that?

A Well, it is true that I have functioned as chairman of the legislative committee for several organizations. And you know the “second legislature” did move out Hillsboro Street closer to me in the deluxe motels after the destruction of the Sir Walter Hotel. Thus the label originates from my proximity and my organizational assignments. . . . I never felt that I was too political. No one who knows me well could ever have suspected me of wanting political power. I have never wanted to be a politician and have always hoped I could remain a minister. I did feel that the church is as good a place to achieve or to help achieve desired political change, or changes which are brought about by political leadership. I have never wanted to do anything political that would advance the church I serve or the denomination I belong to or religion in general. So I am not a “political parson,” but I do believe with Aristotle that every person is a political animal.

Q The Gospels speak of those dragged before kings and rulers to bear witness. Now you’re not one to be “dragged,” but you’ve certainly found yourself testifying in the presence of political power on more than one occasion.

A I have been blessed by politician-friends in high places. Four of my speeches have been inserted into the *Congressional Record*, by four different Senators. I have been to the White House under two presidents. On the other hand, I have stood in vigil at the gates of the White House and have released public letters challenging the record of some of our officials. As I said before, politics is not a dirty but a beautiful word, so let’s be unblushingly political, all of us. That’s the crucial difference between Jesus’ comments and our privilege to participate in the democratic process. We need not be victims when we can contribute. In my judgment, you cannot be a Christian unpolitically today.

Q You don’t see any conflict, then, between preaching the Gospel and practicing politics?

- A I can hear people saying: This is a preacher talking about politics and government and he has hardly mentioned God, the Bible and the church. Why doesn't he stop his meddling and stick to preaching the gospel? Well, the Gospel has something to say to those people. "For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me. Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." If anyone knows a non-political way of dealing with massive hunger, massive sickness, massive poor housing, massive prison reform, and doing it realistically, I should love to hear from him.
- Q Your defense of the separation of church and state does not imply, then, that church people and churches themselves should not get involved in politics?
- A Not at all. When the church withdraws from the political life of society to protect its purity it ends by becoming the very thing it sought to escape. For when the church has said to politics, You render to Caesar and we shall render to God, the church has already become a replica of the society it abjures. And society will never be transformed or redeemed by a replica of itself.
- Q How does your political record differ from the aggressive politics of the new religious right?
- A I defend their right to be engaged in politics. What I do object to is their choice of issues, the very circumscribed list of issues, by which they grade candidates. Their limited morality tends to deal with personal and surface sins instead of the more biblical definition of sin as rooted in powers and principalities in high places. Moreover, their moralism tends to approve of the privileged few and to forget the masses suffering on the borders of their own standard of living. Their identity of God with our American way of life, of a military God who crusades

against our enemies, of a vindictive God who approves of capital punishment — all this tends to place God on narrow political grounds. Nonetheless we must not work to deprive them of being political; we must expose their politics for what much of it is, selfishness under religious sanction.

Q You must admit that as a Baptist preacher politics has mixed you with strange company and put you in odd places. You have defended the Ku Klux Klan and the Communist Workers Party, the American Nazis and the Moonies, and all sorts of schemes viewed by conventional society as suspect.

A Do I not find it an awkward stance for a preacher to defend such things as pornography and brown-bagging and the decriminalization of marijuana and of private crimes; the answer is yes indeed this is an embarrassment. From time to time I have passed the burden on to other civil libertarians to testify in these cases. And on occasion I have simply said that I have to wear two hats. I have also explained the situation by saying that, whereas I may be personally opposed to certain practices, that as a citizen in a pluralist society believing in freedom, we have to deal with these issues not so much as sins as social issues. Also what may be an ethical matter to some of us may not be so to others but we all must promote the free society. I have on occasions said that, whereas I defend the rights of all people to do certain things as citizens, on Sunday morning I will denounce these practices from the pulpit! It is still true that I fear obscenity less than censorship; this is a case where we need not laws to suppress but a deeper commitment to the mandate to overcome evil with good.

Q Did you ever use the pulpit for political purposes?

A I have been charged with that by some within my own congregation and by many without. But the answer to that charge rests on the conception of the free pulpit. As I see it, to preach the Gospel devoid of political relevance is impossible.

Q There's a widely circulated jingle about your Pullen ministry:
"Pullen stands for preachers who in politics dabble
Exciting the fury and hate of the rabble.
Enflaming the mind with fanatical vigor
To crush down the whites and build up the nigger."

A I guess I've heard the whole range of criticism over the years, but I've tried not to let that type of mentality deter me from exercising the free pulpit. The Pullen congregation guaranteed me that privilege.... To win the victory requires that we give to the pulpit, I should say, restore to the pulpit, that freedom in responsibility through which alone the gospel can be proclaimed in its fulness and without fear. Many silent folk would exhibit the same love of freedom and truth if circumstances permitted the kind of freedom that is available to a minister who is unafraid to accept it. The miracle of change, the leaven of transformation, begins to take place in the community where there is at least one free voice. The editor, the school teacher, yes, even the politician, breathe a freer air and move with a firmer courage, however, unconsciously, and act with a different emphasis in those communities where truth is constantly proclaimed. Truth spoken in one area elicits the expression of truth in every area. All other freedoms depend ultimately upon the freedom of religion, and the freedom of religion is null and void until the pulpit has come to speak the truth in love.

Q Bill, from what you describe, you seem to have pursued a double-vocation in life, the one in the free pulpit of a local congregation, the other in your worldly citizenship role.

A I have tried to act out in my life, as an ordinary citizen in a democratic society, the implications of the Gospel. That meant I spent much of my time beyond my parish duties. For instance, during my ten-year tenure as chairman of the North Carolina Advisory Committee to the Civil Rights Commission, we conducted investigations and progress reports on Indian rights, prisoner rights, migrant worker rights and the state of desegregation within the public

schools. We also conducted a hearing with recommendations on the Greensboro massacre of 1979.

Q What do you think of the reversal of the present political leadership to your long campaign for basic democratic rights?

A I am painfully aware of this reversal — of the cutbacks in allocations for these studies and of the firing of Arthur Fleming, Chairman of the U. S. Commission. Oftentimes our feeble efforts get thwarted, and some have even alluded to what we have done as exercises in futility and failure.

Q Does it bother you that progress is not always forthcoming?

A No, our Lord never assured us success; He only demanded that we remain faithful to Him in the works that He does in the world. I have, to be honest, on the whole fought a losing fight, and I am forced to address myself to the New Testament command “not to grow weary in well-doing.”

Q One of your heroes was Frank Porter Graham. His career was also accompanied by tragic set-backs, yet he was a noble-spirited loser. Am I correct in surmising that your eulogy to him expresses your own philosophy? Here is how some of it reads:

“My final memory is a legacy. It has to do with Dr. Graham’s attitude regarding controversy. How could so saintly a man be so controversial, and survive? It was always a part of my teaching that good men managed to avoid controversy but here was without doubt one of the most moral men who ever lived in our state moving from one controversy to the other and always maintaining respect and regard for his opponents. His formula was simple: Don’t go around looking for controversy, mounted and armed like a knight. And don’t waste your energies and resources on side issues and peripheral matters. But when you encounter situations of principle, when you are face to face with ethical issues, summon all your powers

and meet them head on. He told us this and something else too. In a day when, as a famous football coach once put it, 'Winning is not everything. It is the only thing,' Dr. Graham said that losing may be more important than winning if you can make a witness in losing a battle. Be sure, he said, that you go down with all flags flying."

- A You may say that I have indeed had to ponder those words afresh since I wrote them on the occasion of a great man's death. My recent experience has made them come alive.
- Q Turning to a more basic question, what would you say has been the theological undergirding of your preaching and your practice?
- A The more I understand Christian faith, the more I see the Bible is concerned with justice. And I've found that if God has any prejudice at all, He's prejudiced on the side of the poor and deprived and underprivileged. . . . The Scriptures tell us that the Messiah who was to come and the Messiah who did come, and is ever coming, identifies His mission and His message with the underprivileged, the powerless, the alienated, the blind and the lame and the suppressed. If the church ever realizes that God is on the side of these people and is summoning us to their cause, all of these fabricated axioms and myths about welfare people will be clobbered, every mountain of pride and self illusion will be brought low, every valley or rut shall be filled, and we shall make straight in the desert highways for our God. And when we have ministered unto the least of God's children we have done it unto Him.

This booklet is based on taped interviews made during 1981 and on a book in preparation covering the nearly fifty years of Finlator's public career.

Historical Society had the perspicacity to discern this several years ago and garnered those files for itself. Four U. S. Senators have inserted his speeches into the Congressional Record. He has conducted a spirited correspondence with Senator (ret.) Sam Ervin, with whom he was closely identified on the constitutional rights of citizens but with whom he diverged on practically every other matter. Listed among his friends are Paul Green, Frank Porter Graham, Marion Wright, Sam Ragan, Tom Lassiter and a host of other distinguished Americans.

As might be expected, his name is synonymous with controversy — controversies such as those surrounding his attacks on Billy Graham and the Vietnam war, and his 1979 telegram to President Carter concerning the desegregation of the state university system. Never a person to lack courage or to keep quiet when he saw human values threatened, he has earned the reputation of fulfilling the motto of the university he attended, pro humanitate (Wake Forest). As democracy thrives on its creative dissenters, few and harried though they be, Bill has been one of democracy's finest promoters. His paraphrase of the Gospel reads, "There is more sorrow in heaven over one dissenter squelched, than over all conservatives who brook no dissent." W. W. Finlator is truly North Carolina's voice of dissent.

"God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly, against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it."

— Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics*, II, Pt. 1, (1957), p. 386.

"We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

— Barth's disciple, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Letters from Prison*, p. 17.

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